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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 03594

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, FR, PINT
SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE -- JANUARY

1977

SUMMARY. AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF EVENTS THAT ORDINARILY WOULD HAVE BEEN HEADLINE NEWS THEMSELVES, THE STRUGGLE WITHIN THE MAJORITY OVER THE CANDIDACY IN THE MAYORALTY RACE OF PARIS TOOK MOST OF THE NATION'S ATTENTION DURING JANUARY. BECAUSE OF JACQUES CHIRAC'S SURPRISE CANDIDACY SOME OBSERVERS CALLED INTO QUESTION THE VERY INSTITUTIONS OF FRANCE. AT LEAST CHIRAC HAS PERHAPS CREATED AN IRREPARABLE BREACH BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE PRESIDENT. MEANWHILE THE RPR, FROM A POSITION OF WEAKNESS ONE YEAR AGO, IS RISING FROM ITS ASHES WITH THE OLD GAULLIST CRY OF "NATIONAL INTEREST." THE LEFT IS NOT WITHOUT ITS OWN TROUBLES, HOWEVER, AND HAS YET TO REACH AGREEMENT ON SINGLE ELECTORAL LISTS NOT ONLY IN THE CAPITAL CITY, BUT IN MANY OTHER FRENCH CITIES AND TOWNS BESIDES. TEMPERS ALSO ROSE ON THE LEFT DURING JANUARY OVER OPPOSITION POLICY TOWARDS PRIVATE EDUCATION AND TOWARDS THE ATTITUDE THAT SHOULD BE ADOPTED CONCERNING MAJORITY IN-FIGHTING. AT LONG LAST PUBLIC OPINION POLLS BROUGHT SOME GOOD NEWS TO GISCARD AND THE GOF. THE QUESTION OF THE MONTH, HOWEVER, IS WHETHER OR NOT THE PRESIDENT WILL SUCCEED IN STAYING ABOVE POLITICS, AS HE HAS DECLARED HE WILL, AND THEREBY PERHAPS SURVIVE NOT ONLY THE STRUGGLES THAT ARE GOING ON AMONG THE VARIOUS PARTIES THAT ARE SUPPOSED TO SUPPORT HIS POLICY, BUT ALSO THE EVENTUAL POSSIBILITY OF A VICTORY OF THE LEFT IN 1978. NO ONE IS NAIVE ENOUGH AT THIS POINT TO SAY THAT THE RESULTS OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

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WILL NOT BE AN INDICATOR OF AND INFLUENCE ON THE OUTCOME OF THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. MEANWHILE, THROUGH THICK AND THIN, PRIME MINISTER BARRE PRESENTS AN IMAGE OF IMPERTURBABILITY IN THE MIDST OF ALL THE YELLING. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND: THE MAYOR OF MOSCOW, VLADIMIR PROMYSLOV, SOJOURNED IN PARIS AT THE END OF JANUARY. ONE OF HIS VISITS WAS TO THE CITY HALL. WITH THE PRESIDENT OF FRANCE AND HIS FORMER PRIME MINISTER ENGAGED IN BITTER STRIFE CONCERNING THE MAYORALTY, PROMYSLOV MUST HAVE SPLIT HIS SIDES OVER CAPITALIST PLURALISM. BUT IF THE BATTLE OF PARIS WEREN'T ENOUGH, JANUARY 1977 WAS ALSO WITNESS TO ABOU DAOUD WHICH COULD LOSE JEWISH VOTES FOR THE MAJORITY IN PARIS. IN ADDITION, A HIGHER COURT DISMISSED "CANARD ENCHAINE'S" BUGGING CHARGES AGAINST THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR - WHICH EVEN THE MAJORITY PRESS DECRIED; AND MICHEL DEBRE LAUNCHED HIS COMMITTEE FOR THE INDEPENDENCE AND UNITY OF FRANCE - TO COUNTER

GOF'S EFFORTS TO GET THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO AGREE ON THE ELECTION OF A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT THROUGH UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE. ON THE OTHER HAND EDMOND SIMEONI, CONVICTED RINGLEADER OF THE ALERIA SHOOT-OUT IN THE SUMMER OF 1975 WAS PEACEFULLY BACK IN HIS CORSICAN HOSPITAL. EMPLOYING WHAT "LE FIGARO" CALLED THE "LOGIC OF APPEASEMENT," THE COURT OF STATE SECURITY ORDERED A NONSUIT FOR SOME OF THE MILITARY PERSONNEL DEEMED RESPONSIBLE FOR DEMORALIZATION IN THE FRENCH ARMED FORCES IN NOVEMBER 1975 (PARIS 0639 8/1/76). BUT THE HOTEL DE VILLE GOT THE HEADLINES.

2. MAY-OR DREAMS COME TRUE: SO THE GAULLISTS MIGHT

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-----041702Z 058916 /47

R 041551Z FEB 77
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HAVE SUNG WHEN JACQUES CHIRAC, PRESIDENT OF THE RASSEMBLEMENT POUR LA REPUBLIQUE, DECLARED HIS CANDIDACY FOR MAYOR ON JANUARY 19. BY SO DOING HE FLEW IN THE FACE OF GISCARD AND MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR PONIATOWSKI, WHO HAVE BEEN TRYING TO BREAK RPR POWER FOR THE PAST 21/2 YEARS. THE LATEST DEVELOPMENT IS THAT CHIRAC HAS REFUSED TO RUN ANY JOINT LISTS WITH D'ORNANO, THE PRESIDENT'S CHOICE FOR MAYOR, SINCE HE NOW BELIEVES THAT BECAUSE OF HIS OWN CANDIDACY THE LEFT HAS NO LONGER ANY CHANCE OF WINNING TOWN HALL. FOR THE MOMENT CHIRAC LOOKS LIKE A SURE BET; BUT INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN AND CENTRIST ANTIPATHY TOWARDS THE FORMER PM RUNS CLOSE TO HATRED AT THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, AND IT IS THE 109 COUNCILLORS THEMSELVES WHO WILL VOTE FOR MAYOR AFTER THE GENERAL ELECTION. A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE LIKE LAFAY OR TAITTINGER, THOUGH UNLIKELY, IS STILL NOT OUT OF THE QUESTION.

3. THE OTHER MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: HAPPILY FOR THE MAJORITY, PARIS IS NOT FRANCE. OF THE 620 CITIES IN FRANCE WITH POPULATION OVER 9,000, ACCORDS ON SINGLE MAJORITY LISTS HAVE BEEN REACHED IN ALL BUT A FEW DOZEN. AMONG THE NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS: TOULON, WHERE A RPR CANDIDATE WILL RUN AGAINST AN INCUMBENT IR MAYOR; VERSAILLES, WHERE THERE MAY BE THREE MAJORITY LISTS; AND NICE, WHERE THE RPR IS THREATENING NOT TO SUPPORT INCUMBENT IR MAYOR MEDECIN. FOR THE UNION OF THE LEFT, THINGS ARE FAR FROM ROSY. AT THE MONTH'S END, OPPOSITION LEADERS WERE CLAIMING THAT SINGLE LISTS HAD BEEN AGREED UPON IN 165 CITIES OUT OF 220 WITH A POPULATION OVER 30,000; BUT
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HUGE PROBLEMS REMAIN IN PARIS (SEE BELOW) AND ELSEWHERE, WHERE THE COMMUNISTS ARE CLAIMING MORE THAN WHAT THE SOCIALISTS SEE AS THE PCF'S FAIR SHARE OF THE LISTS. ONE CONSLUSION IS CERTAIN: COMMUNISTS WILL BE IMPLANTED IN MORE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS THAN EVER AFTER ELECTIONS THIS COMING MARCH. THIS IS THE FIRST STEP IN THE PCF'S LONG-TERM STRATEGY OF ACQUIRING DOMESTIC LEGITIMACY IN FRENCH POLITICS.

4. MADAME DE SEVIGNE-BARRE/CHIRAC-MONTESQUIEU: THIS WAS THE MONTH OF LETTERS, AND EVERYONE GOT IN THE ACT. ON JANUARY 4TH GISCARD WROTE ALL 36,394 MAYORS OF FRANCE INFORMING THEM OF MEASURES HE PROPOSED TAKING TO BRING INCREASED POWERS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT. NOT TO BE OUTDONE, PS LEADER FRANCOIS MITTERRAND WROTE THE SAME MAYORS 10 DAYS LATER OUTLINING HIS PARTY'S POSITION ON THE SAME SUBJECT. MEANWHILE MICHEL D'ORNANO, MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND IR CANDIDATE IN PARIS, WROTE RPR PARIS LEADERS PROPOSING SINGLE LISTS. IT DIDN'T WORK. PENS WENT WILD AT THE MONTH'S END, HOWEVER, WHEN PRIME MINISTER BARRE AND JACQUES CHIRAC GOT INTO AN EPISTOLARY EXCHANGE OF SUCH FREEZING POLITENESS THAT "CANARD'S" FRONT-PAGE HEADLINE READ "QUATRE LETTRES POUR EN DIRE CINQ" (FOUR LETTERS TO SAY FIVE). THE END RESULT WAS AN ALL-TIME LOW IN RELATIONS BETWEEN CHIRAC AND HIS FORMER BOSS VGE (PARIS 02077).

5. THE MAJORITY: DURING THE MONTH THE FORTUNES OF THE RPR ROSE IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO THE FALL OF ITS MAJORITY PARTNERS. IN A REAR-GUARD ACTION PONIATOWSKI REASSUMED THE PRESIDENCY OF THE IR AND THE YOUNG GISCARDIANS HELD A MEETING TO REMAKE THEIR LEADERSHIP DEPLETED DUE TO DEFECTIONS AT THE TOP. THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS, JACQUELINE NEBOUT, ACTUALLY GOT INTO A PHYSICAL TUSSLE WITH DIDIER BARIANI, PRESIDENT OF THE PARIS RS FEDERATION, AFTER SHE DECIDED TO ENTER ONE OF

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CHIRAC'S MAYORAL LISTS IN DEFIANCE OF RS SUPPORT FOR D'ORNANO. COMPARED TO ALL THIS, THE SMOOTH RPR MACHINE IN THE MONTPARNASSE SKYSCRAPER MADE THE REST OF THE MAJORITY LOOK DOUBLY BAD. IF ONE YEAR AGO OBSERVERS WERE SAYING THAT THE ETAT UDR (UDR STATE) WAS DISAPPEARING, THE SITUATION APPEARS FOR THE MOMENT TO HAVE MADE AN ABOUT FACE, AND ALL ARE IN AGREEMENT THAT CHIRAC'S CANDIDACY IS MERELY A STEPPING STONE TO A BID FOR THE ELYSEE. UNDER THESE CONDITIONS, ONE COULD ALMOST BE-

LIEVE THE PRESIDENT WISHING FOR A VICTORY OF THE LEFT IN THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. AFTER ALL, HE'S ALWAYS BEEN SUSPECTED OF HOLDING HIS HAND OUT TO THE SOCIALISTS AND OF HAVING ACCEPTED THE GAULLISTS ONLY OUT OF POLITICAL NECESSITY.

6. THE PS: THE PARIS PS FEDERATION, RULED BY MITTERRAND'S BUGBEAR THE CERES, NAMED ONE OF ITS FOUNDERS, GEORGES SARRE, PS CANDIDATE FOR TOWN HALL. THIS RAN

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R 041551Z FEB 77
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INTO OPPOSITION NOT ONLY WITH THE PC, BUT WITH THE MITTERRAND MODERATES WHO FEEL THAT A HARDLINE CERES CANDIDATE WILL LOSE VOTES FOR THE LEFT IN THE CAPITAL CITY. IN ADDITION CERES, WHICH TRIES TO PRESENT ITSELF MORE AND MORE AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE WHOLE PARTY, HAS ASKED FOR A PUBLIC UPDATING OF THE COMMON PROGRAM LOOKING FORWARD TO AN EVENTUAL VICTORY OF THE LEFT IN 1978. MITTERRAND IS AGAINST ANY SUCH PUBLIC BRAWL BECAUSE HE KNOWS THIS WOULD NOT HELP UNITED LEFT RELATIONS (ALTHOUGH QUIET DISCUSSIONS ON UPDATING HAVE BEEN GOING ON FOR AT LEAST A YEAR). FINALLY, MITTERRAND HIMSELF, IN A MASTERPIECE OF WRITTEN SOPHISTRY, WAS FORCED TO "SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT" CONCERNING PRIVATE EDUCATION IN FRANCE AFTER BOTH THE PCF AND THE PS GENERAL DELEGATE FOR EDUCATION CAME OUT WITH SEPARATE REPORTS -- THAT UPSET EVERYONE BUT THE PC'S OWN ELECTORATE -- ADVOCATING IMMEDIATE NATIONALIZATION OF ALL PRIVATE SCHOOLS SHOULD THE LEFT COME TO POWER. IT MAY HAVE BEEN THE MAJORITY'S ONLY BALM OF THE MONTH.

7. THE PCF: THE PCF PRESENTED ITS OWN HENRI FISZBIN TO HEAD THE PC PARIS LISTS (THUS MAKING HIM A DE FACTO PC CANDIDATE FOR THE MAYORALTY) DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE UNITED LEFT'S CHANCES OF TAKING TOWN HALL ARE -- AND ALWAYS HAVE BEEN -- SLIGHT. THERE IS STILL TALK THAT BOTH THE PCF AND THE PS WILL RESOLVE THEIR DIFFICULTIES AND DECIDE ON A SINGLE LEFT CANDIDATE (A NON-MILITANT PERSONALITY KNOWN FOR HIS "LEFT" VIEWS?) AND THE COMPOSITION OF UNITED LISTS. TO DATE, HOWEVER, JOINT NEGOTIATING EFFORTS AT THE WORKING LEVEL HAVE ENDED IN FAILURE.
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A FURTHER SOURCE OF DEEP WORRY TO THE PCF IS THE LACKADAISICAL MANNER IN WHICH THE PS VIEWS THE CURRENT BATTLE WITHIN THE MAJORITY. CALLING CHIRAC AND GISCARD TWEEDLEDUM AND TWEEDLEDEE, PCF SECRETARY GENERAL MAR-CHAI HAS WARNED THE PS, TO NO AVAIL, TO BEWARE THE FAL-SE APPEARANCE OF A CHOICE. HIS REAL WORRY, OF COURSE, IS THAT THE PS COULD CUDDLE UP TO THE IR/CENTRISTS, THERE-BY PUSHING THE PCF OUT TO THE FRINGE. (THE PS TAKES FOR REAL THE CHIRAC/GISCARD RIFT OVER THE PARIS CITY HALL.)

8. FAR LEFT: THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTIONARY LEAGUE (LCR), THE WORKERS' STRUGGLE AND THE COMMUNIST WORKERS' ORGAN-IZATION PASSED AN ACCORD ON JANUARY 24 PROMISING TO WORK TOWARDS CLOSER COOPERATION BETWEEN THE THREE MOVEMENTS. THEY ARE PRESENTING UNIFIED LISTS IN 24 CITIES OF OVER 30,000 INHABITANTS FOR THE MARCH ELECTIONS. IN ADDITION THE PSU (PARTI SOCIALISTE UNIFIE), WHICH HAS DISTANCED ITSELF IN RECENT YEARS FROM THE ABOVE THREE, HELD ITS 10TH NATIONAL CONGRESS AND DECIDED ON A TEMPORARY STRAT-EGIC ELECTORAL ALLIANCE WITH THE SIGNATORIES OF THE COM-MON PROGRAM. THIS DECISION, VOTED BY 67 PERCENT OF THE DELEGATES, RAN INTO OPPOSITION WITH A SECOND GROUP (22 PERCENT) VOTING FOR CLOSER COOPERATION WITH THE REST OF THE FAR LEFT AND A THIRD GROUP (11 PERCENT) ADVOCATING THAT THE PARTY TRANSFORM ITSELF IN A UNION OF THE EXPLOIT-ED. FINALLY, UNDER THE DIRECTION OF ALAIN KRIVINE, THE LCR HELD ITS OWN SECOND ANNUAL CONGRESS (JANUARY 28-30) WHICH SERVED MAINLY TO UNDERSCORE THE PARTY'S INTERNAL PROBLEMS. IF IN UNITY THERE IS STRENGTH, THE FAR LEFT IS WEAKER NOW THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE 1968.

9. POLLS: EVEN IN THE INCREASINGLY POLL-OBSESSED FRENCH REPUBLIC, JANUARY SHOULD STAND OUT. FOR ONCE HOWEVER, THEY WERE GENERALLY HEARTWARNING TO THE GOVERNMENT. ONE SHOWED PRIME MINISTER BARRE'S PLAN AS BEING BETTER RE-CEIVED AND UNDERSTOOD BY THE PUBLIC. ANOTHER SHOWED A CONFIDENTIAL

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JUMP OF TEN POINTS IN BARRE'S PERSONAL POPULARITY OVER DECEMBER 1976 AND A FAR WIDER ACCEPTANCE OF HIS CRUCIAL ECONOMIC AUSTERITY PROGRAM THAN IN PREVIOUS MONTHS. TWO OTHERS -- WHICH MUST HAVE ESPECIALLY GLADDENED THE PRES-IDENT'S (AND PONIATOWSKI'S) HEART, SHOW A DROP OF 12 PERCENT IN CHIRAC'S POPULARITY SINCE LAST NOVEMBER, AND SHOW CHIRAC PLACING THIRD, BEHIND MITTERRAND AND GISCARD -- WERE A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION TO BE HELD NOW. EVEN THE BESIEGED PRESIDENT MOVED UP A COUPLE OF POINTS ON THE POPULARITY POLL COMPARED TO DECEMBER. FRENCH PUBLIC OPINION IS AS FICKLE AS THAT OF ANY OTHER WESTERN DEMO-CRACY; BUT WITH ONLY SIX WEEKS TO GO BEFORE ELECTIONS,

GISCARD MIGHT BE LED TO THINK THAT MAYBE IT PAYS AFTER
ALL TO STAY OUT OF POLITICS.

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10. THE PRESIDENT: AT ONE POINT, SHORTLY AFTER CHIRAC'S JANUARY 19 DECLARATION OF HIS CANDIDACY, THE HUE AND CRY IN THE NON-GAULLIST MAJORITY WAS THAT HIS MOVE CONSTITUTED A THREAT TO THE INSTITUTION OF THE PRESIDENCY. RAYMOND ARON, AMONG OTHERS, PROMPTLY CAME OUT AND POOH-POOHED THE ACCUSATION, BUT IN FACT IT IS SOMEWHAT JUSTIFIED. EMPLOYING THE DOUBLE LANGUAGE FRENCH POLITICIANS, AMONG OTHERS, USE TO COVER THEIR TRACKS, WE COULD SAY THAT THE GAULLIST CHIRAC IS ATTACKING THE PRESIDENCY IN ORDER, AS HE SEES THINGS, TO SAVE IT. THE DECADE-LONG ANTIPATHY -- TO PUT IT MILDLY -- BETWEEN THE IR AND THE UDR HAS REACHED A KIND OF CRESCENDO THIS JANUARY; THERE IS NOW SO MUCH BAD BLOOD SPILLED THAT THOSE WHO SEE THE FIRST SIGNS OF THE END OF THE FIFTH REPUBLIC (THAT IS TO SAY, THE BREAK-UP OF THE BASIC MAJORITY, EXCLUDING THE CENTRISTS, THAT HAS BEEN ITS HALLMARK) ARE NOT SO FAR FROM WRONG. BY EXTENSION, GISCARD'S OFT-REPEATED AVOWAL TO REMAIN IN OFFICE UNTIL THE END OF HIS SEVEN-YEAR MANDATE, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS IN 1978, IS HELD BY THE RPR TO BE A NON-GAULLIAN ATTITUDE OF THE WORST ORDER. THE IMMEDIATE QUESTION IS WHETHER OR NOT THE PRESIDENT HAS ANY ROOM LEFT IN WHICH TO MANEUVER.

11. NOW AND THEN THE THEME OF PRESIDENTIALIZATION OF THE FRENCH REGIME REAPPEARS. MOST RECENTLY JEAN-PIERRE FOURCADE, MINISTER OF EQUIPMENT AND PRESIDENT OF THE IR CLUB PERSPECTIVES ET REALITES, PUBLICLY PROPOSED BOTH DEPRIVING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF ITS RIGHT TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT BY A VOTE OF CENSURE AND DEPRIVING THE

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PRESIDENT, AT THE SAME TIME, OF THE RIGHT TO DISSOLVE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. AS THE POLITICAL SITUATION NOW STANDS IN FRANCE, THE ABOVE MOVE WOULD IRONICALLY HAVE THE EFFECT OF STRENGTHENING THE PRESIDENT'S HAND AGAINST THE KIND OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN WHICH A LARGE FACT-ION OF HIS OWN MAJORITY HAS TURNED AGAINST HIM. TRUE, THE VITAL ISSUES NOW GET VOTED. BUT HOW OFTEN CAN A

SCENE LIKE LAST YEAR'S CAPITAL GAINS TAX BILL (PARIS 12510, APRIL 10, 1976) BE REPEATED BEFORE THE PRESIDENT FINDS HIMSELF DEPRIVED OF THE NECESSARY AUTHORITY TO GOVERN THE COUNTRY?

12. CONCLUSION: AT THIS POINT THINGS REVOLVE AROUND RAYMOND BARRE: WITH EVERY PUBLIC APPEARANCE, WITH EVERY DECLARATION, THE PRIME MINISTER SEEMS TO INCREASE AT ONCE HIS OWN AUTHORITY AND HIS POPULARITY. SO LONG AS HIS ECONOMIC STABILIZATION PLAN CONTINUES TO GIVE SIGNS OF WORKING, WHICH IT NOW DOES; SO LONG AS BARRE HOLDS HIS SEEMINGLY INDOMITABLE OWN AGAINST UNIONS, BUSINESSMEN AND POLITICOS -- NOT TO MENTION HECKLERS -- HE COULD CONTINUE TO FILL THE AUTHORITY GAP LEFT BY THE PRESIDENT. CONVERSELY BARRE'S DEMISE, WHICH APPEARS FOR THE MOMENT HIGHLY UNLIKELY, WOULD IN ALL PROBABILITY BE A CRUSHING BLOW TO THE PRESIDENT. THIS GIVES BARRE TREMENDOUS LEVERAGE WITH THE ELYSEE IN THE MAKING OF DAY-TO-DAY POLICY BECAUSE GISCARD COULD NOT READILY COPE WITH BARRE'S RESIGNATION, WHICH THE PRIME MINISTER FIGURATIVELY CARRIES AROUND IN HIS HIP POCKET. CHIRAC'S GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT HE'S PREPARED TO GO THE LIMIT AND INDIRECTLY ATTACK THE PRESIDENT COULD WORK AGAINST HIM IF ENOUGH OF THE MAJORITY ELECTORATE, WHICH CHIRAC NOW CLAIMS TO REPRESENT, DECIDES HE'S GOING TOO FAR. THE BATTLE OF PARIS IS A NATIONAL ONE AND MUST BE READ AS SUCH. CHIRAC, EVEN IF HE WINS, MAY HAVE OVERPLAYED HIS HAND. RUSH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 04-Feb-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PARIS03594
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770041-0080
Format: TEL
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770272/aaaacllu.tel
Line Count: 575
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 8dc897cb-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 11
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3406315
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE -- JANUARY 1977 SUMMARY. AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF EVENTS THAT ORD
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, FR
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8dc897cb-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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Declassified/Released
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Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009